

Day by Day: Faith and the Future

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 24, 2020

7th Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 1:6-14; John 17:1-11

Reflection: Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

Music: Take My Life and Let It Be; Onward Christian Soldiers

Greeting: May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Music: Take My Life and Let It Be

1. Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

2. Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for Thee,
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

3. Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from Thee,
Filled with messages from Thee.

4. Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
every power as Thou shalt choose,
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

5. Take my will, and make it Thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own;
it shall be Thy royal throne,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

6. Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for Thee,
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Prayer: Lord of Life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead you restored to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Throughout these fifty days of Easter we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and throughout eternity. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 68: 1-10, 32-35

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm. A Song.

Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God. But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy. Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds— his name is the Lord— be exultant before him. Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land. O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, Selah the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished; your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord, Selah O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies. Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God! (Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 68 as it speaks of God's power and majesty. We hear of God's great mercy in providing for the needy. We hear the righteous should be joyful and sing. What causes you to sing of God's majesty? Of God's mercy? What are you thankful for when you lift up your prayers to the Lord? What could you do to show mercy today? What could you do to show grace? How can we honor God in how we treat others?

Prayer: O God, our Holy One, our altar, our cloud. In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your temple. Accept the sacrifices we offer, and draw us to into the fire of your Spirit. Help us to be a people full of mercy. Help us to be a people always ready to be thankful. Help us to show your grace to others. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from the book of Acts, chapter 1, verses 6-14.

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers. (Acts 1:6-14 NRSV)*

Our second reading for today comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 17, verses 1-11.

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. (John 17:1-11 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

In today's readings we look at the ideas of faith and the future, and this will be the next to last in our Day by Day Easter series. Next week is Pentecost. On this last Sunday we look at two different ideas that mesh well because we're always worried about the future. The problem is that often when we start thinking about the future and expecting something, we start to stand still waiting for it to come. We also have the comfort of faith preparing us for the future. I think it's important that we remember both of these because taking on the future requires faith, and it requires faith because of the fact that when we take on the future, we are taking on the unknown. We don't know what's coming. Even if we have an idea of what's coming, we often don't know when. And that can be scary.

In John, Jesus finishes a rather long discourse with some comfort. That Jesus is going to the Father and that he's going to look out for us. That he's given us the words that we needed. That we know in truth that Jesus came to help us. Came from God, returned to God. And I think that that concept is easier for us because we're after the fact. So we can look back and say, "yes that's something we know." But we get that comfort of Christ telling us that all mine are yours and all yours are mine and I have been glorified in them and now I am no longer in the world but they are in the world and I am coming to you. And he asks for our protection. And in one sense he's asking for the protection of those that are around him, but in another sense that's the protection for all who believe. And sort of that cascading effect. It is important for us to remember whose care we are in as we approach the future.

On the other hand we see something rather familiar in Acts. In Acts, we get a familiar tension of wondering what comes next. And I think we also get a picture of what we often do when faced with the unknown. The disciples want to know, with people gathered around, want to know is this the time? Is this the time we've been waiting for? Is this what we've been preparing for? If not, when should we expect it? The reply is not in the same comfort that we get in John. It's not for you to know. You don't get to know the times that God has set. You don't get to know God's plans because you probably wouldn't fully understand them. That's hard. Now we are comforted and being told that we are going to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. That we receive power and we will be witnesses to the ends of the earth. That we will bear witness to others of all that Christ has taught. However, when he ascends, we get the idea that everybody stands around waiting. Waiting like there's something else coming. Waiting like there is something else about to happen. They've been given this idea that they won't know when it's going to happen, and yet they're still standing there waiting. And that image is one that I think applies so well, because so often we go "I want to know what's going to happen next" and we stand around waiting, not realizing that in some ways we're the ones that pave the path to the future. We weren't told "go forth and sit around and wait for everything to happen." We are told go and do. Go and bear witness. Go and be my witness in Jerusalem in all Judea in Samaria and to the ends of the earth. But here they are, staring up like they're waiting for their next instruction. And that's when two men in white robes appear with the question, what are you doing? Why are you looking for someone who's gone? He'll come again, but like he told you, you don't know when and you won't. And that uncertainty is hard to deal with.

But that's the uncertainty we deal with in everyday life. We want to know the future. We want to predict the future. We want to claim the future, and the truth is we build the future. When they go back, they devote themselves to prayer. And they go back, and they begin the early church. I think it's interesting that on this opening chapter of Acts we begin with hesitation. Hesitation to fully understand and hesitation to act. I think it's because it's hard, because we so want to be sure of what we're doing. And the truth is that I don't know if we'll ever be 100% sure, at least not fully of exactly what it is we're supposed to be doing. The

problem is, is that we want certainty, to the point that we will dissect anything to be able to get a glimpse at what's coming. And sometimes we go so far that we invent what's coming next just so that we can pretend that we know. Now, there are things we can do to be prepared for things that we know are coming, but my honest answer is do your best. Do what you were taught. If you make a mistake, God will be there. If you screw up God, will be there. Jesus didn't go "well I'm leaving you on your own, and you're going to be out there trying to figure all this out, and you'll have no help." No, you'll be guided. You'll have help. Will we mess up? Yes. We mess up all the time. We get antsy. We get anxious. We want to jump ahead. We want to force things to happen. Sometimes we get so caught up in wanting to know what comes next that we pour over prophecy and prediction to the point that we start making updates and claiming we know. We see this in history time and time again. We abandon faith for the surety of the comfort of pretending to know what comes next.

For me faith isn't knowing what's coming next. Faith is knowing that God will see me through what comes next. And, granted, that is not an easy thing. I know that in all of this I've been worried. I've been anxious. I've been worried about what will happen to everyone that I know. I've been worried about what's going to happen around the globe. That so often we can prepare for things, and suddenly we're in an unprecedented time. I'm ready for precedented times again. I'm ready for having a better idea of what's going on, but at the same time I know we're not there. And so I have a couple options. I could freak out, and I could try to make everything normal. Chances are I would do more harm than good. Only because I'm standing there staring up at the sky, wishing things were different. That's not what we're told to do though. The part of faith that guides me in all of this is that my faith tells me I may not understand how my actions are going to play out. I may not understand how the good that I can do is going to do anything more than help an individual today, and maybe that's all it's supposed to do. Maybe sometimes the greatest thing we can do is help one another, day by day, and figure out what comes next together, and have faith that whatever comes next, God will be there. The disciples were worried about a lot of things. They're worried about being abandoned, about being left behind, they want to know where Jesus was going, they wanted to know how to get there, they wanted to see the father, they wanted to know when is it going to happen, where is it going to happen, and what do we need to do. And the truth is what we need to do is live. It doesn't mean live recklessly. It doesn't mean ignore the problems around us. It means live through them. If the house is on fire, you don't sit around saying "well I know the house is on fire and fires happen, so I'm just going to let it burn, and then we'll just make do with whatever happens." No, who does that? You try to put out the fire. Even if you know you can't put it out completely, you try to contain it. You try to do as little damage as you can, while doing all the good that you can, then trusting that God will see you through.

I know I have felt at times like the world is on fire. At least my world. These have not been easy weeks. I remember when I had to make the initial call to say, for the first Sunday out of many, that we would not be meeting together in person. And I think back to that because I

was pacing in my parents living room. Pacing back and forth trying to decide what the right thing to do was. Wishing I had the ability to look into the future and know if I was going to overreact. And it came to me that I had to put faith in the information that God had handed to me and do the best thing I could to do no harm. Which is why I give this sermon in an empty church. Because I know that the building is empty, but the people are with me. And if I can do some good by keeping people safe, I will do it. I'll put my faith in God and my hope in God that he will see us through to the other side. This time has not been without hardship and tragedy. My heart aches that there are those of you that I would love to be with to comfort and support. And I can't, at least not physically. But you have all been in my prayers. I worry about all of you, because I love all of you and I care deeply about all of you. But my faith is that God will take care of you if we do the best we can. When Jesus left, he put his trust in us. He put his faith in us, that we would take care of the future. That we wouldn't be reckless. That we wouldn't be careless. That we wouldn't just throw our lives away and we wouldn't throw away the lives of others. That we would do all that we could to help one another and I've seen that. I know that we are still caring for each other, checking in on each other. I know that there are those who have been good enough to take this message to others and share it with others. That we are all still connected because we are the church. We are still together. We are one. We are one in Christ who watches over us, who petitions the Father for us, who is there to help us. Then we have the Holy Spirit, given to us that we would have a guidance. That we would have comfort. That we wouldn't just be set adrift in the ocean with no direction. The direction that we were given was to love. We express that love in care, compassion, support, mercy, and grace.

One of the troubles with being anxious about the future is that we don't know if we've done the right thing until after the fact. We don't know if what we're doing will help until after we can see the results. But the problem is that we weren't called to predict the future. We were called to do the best we can today, with the hopes that we will bring about a better tomorrow. So often we do this without thinking about the fact that that's what we're doing. We don't give to food pantries, estimating who's going to take what and who's going to need what. We give out of our abundance to know that others will be cared for because we don't know what the future will bring. We give for disaster relief before the disaster because we anticipate that at some point the need will be there and we want to provide for whatever future comes our way. Because we know that if we prepare for the worst and hope for the best and pray for the guidance to get through, that together we'll get there with God by our side. The hope of Easter is in the resurrection. That Christ died that we would know that we are loved. That we are forgiven and that we are worthy of salvation. That we are worthy of God's love, of God's care and God's help. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, and every tomorrow after that. We share that hope with others. Part of the hope in the resurrection is knowing that we have been given life and life beyond life. But it also means that we've been given a chance to do all that we can to make this life a life of love. We have been given a chance to make this life something special. That others may know the love that we know. That others may share in the hope that we have. That our faith strengthens others. That when we pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in

heaven, we pray that we make the earth a little more like heaven every day, until the two become one. It's not always easy. Sometimes our faith falters, in small things and in big things, but our faith is never ever so shattered that God can't repair it.

When I think about an uncertain future, I think about the fact that really, I don't know what's coming next. We have models and predictions and we have ways to prepare, and I encourage everyone to do the best they can with what they have and what they know. And to use that knowledge to the best of your ability to show compassion and care and love. Because in these hard times, we need that light. We need to be the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood that the world may know hope. We could be a people living in fear of the unknown, wanting everything to go back to what we do know. But the thing is, the world is already at something we know. What we know is love. Love your neighbor. Love God. Every action we take, if we frame it in that framework, Christ trusted us to be able to do the work to glorify God. In all that we are in all that we do. And if Christ believes in you, if Christ trusts in you, you can do it. I know it's not always easy. And I know it's not always going to be the smoothest of sailing, but Christ can calm the choppy waves. Christ can get us to the other side if we move forward in hope and trust and faith. Our faith isn't that God's going to make everything as easy as possible and we're never going to have struggles. No, it's that we will handle those things with care and compassion and love and mercy. That we will handle them as people of faith knowing that in the darkest of times light can be found. Sometimes that light is us and sometimes that light is others. But it's the light that faith provides because we shine a light when we show that, no matter what comes, we are in it together and we're in it to help one another. Faith guides us to the future that we need. It won't always guide us to the future that we want. The road to get there may not take the turns that we expect. The road to get there may, in fact, take many twists and turns that we never saw coming. It may take twists and turns that we saw coming and didn't know how to handle. And, well, sometimes it may just surprise us completely. Not every surprise is bad. Not every surprise is good. But faith is the thing that equips us to handle every surprise, every turn in the road, every unexpected wave, because it is faith that anchors us. That God will take care of you and me, and that we can extend that care to others, so that they will know that God loves them and will take care of them too.

My prayer is always that we get through this safely. That God will help us in every way we need, and I'm strengthened by that faith. Because I am sure - I am sure - that the future will come, and God's will will be done. I don't always know what that means, but I have faith that God does, and that's good enough for me. If the Lord is with us what can stop us? If God is with us what can stop us from loving? If Christ is with us what can stop us from caring? Nothing. So I tell you this: let faith be your guide, let compassion be your sword, love your shield, mercy your strength, and let faith be the chariot that we take that will lead us in to that tomorrow that God will usher in. And let us go together. Even if right now it cannot be hand in hand, I know that we are united as one, and as one we pray, and as one we love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Music: Onward Christian Soldiers

1. Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle see His banners go!
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

2. At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee;
On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise;
Brothers lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

3. Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
Brothers, we are treading
where the saints have trod.
We are not divided, all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

4. Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng,
Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song.
Glory, laud and honor unto Christ the King,
This through countless ages men and angels sing.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.

Dismissal with Blessing: We are sent forth in the power of Christ's resurrection. Alleluia! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
John & Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Dave Yaw	Aaron Carrell	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Joyce Sly	Nancy Hoke	John Millsap	Larry Sidwell
Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ty Bradley	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Pat Nebel	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe	Brenda Hurt
Sharon Button	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Family of Jerry Jackson	Family of Tom Jester
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Family of Novella Claiborn			
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lyle Whitley	Tammy Fischer and Children	

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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5/24/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

We are set to move into Phase 3 at the end of the month. This will allow for gatherings of up to 10. However, I am recommending at this time that we do not resume full worship services. We would have to have a system for registering and in many cases, we would only have room for 7 people because of my family being with me. I appreciate the tremendous patience of everyone involved in this. I am interested in hearing from you about interest in small prayer services with Holy Communion being served in a safe manner. Masks will be required. I am still having trouble getting around to all the calls I need to make, as time is still limited. If things go well and numbers stay down, we will be able to move into Phase 4, which will allow for groups up to 50. It will still not allow for singing and will still require having seating planned out. I know this is tricky, but we will get it figured out. I know we can. The full plan from the conference is available at the conference website at IGRC.org.

There are copies of the Upper Room available in Greenup in the box. You can also find the current issue online. The new Sunday school quarterly is also in the box for whoever is interested.

Annual Conference has been rescheduled Friday August 14th and Saturday August 15th. General Conference is going to be next year, and I will have more information about that later.

I am still looking for pictures and music to share in services. I'm happy to share prayer requests, video, or anything you would like to share. If you would like to use the church to record music for service, please contact me so that I can give the best guidance I can for both social distancing and recording format. I take your safety very seriously!

As we move into a new phase of recovery in Illinois, please become familiar with the new guidelines. Not all restrictions have been lifted, and if there is a surge, we can go back from Phase 3 into Phase 2 again. This includes social distancing and wearing a mask.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! It is on YouTube and a link can be found on my website as listed below. I am also posting the information on the church Facebook page. If there is anything you would like to contribute, let me know! There will also be printed materials available at the churches to pick up. Please feel free to contact me for more information. If anyone is interested in doing music for any upcoming service, please let me know. There are many options for doing this. I can also share readings or any other video that you'd like to make part of the service. Participation is welcome!

Also, in this time we are still working to keep the bills paid, our missions supported, our apportionments met, and our outreach working. As such, we do need your continued financial support as part of the church. Offerings may be sent to your local treasurer or to the PO Box listed below. I can also arrange to pick them up if I am delivering anything to you. I am

personally grateful for all your continued support in this difficult time. I cannot stress enough that the church is still active and we are still together.

If anyone is interested in online groups or interested in how to form one, I am available to help. There are free tools available to be able to still meet online for Sunday School or other meetings.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus. If you do go out, please follow all distancing guidelines, and if you can, cover your face. Please let others know, and together we will all see this through safely. This is a very real and very serious pandemic. Please do not share false information about it. It only works to undermine the people doing the dangerous work of trying to keep us all safe. If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them or direct you to a source that can.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

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